



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913
PH (517) 373.2420 | FAX (517) 373.2764
www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/garcia/

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Contact: Karen Szczepanski
517-373-2420

Sen. Garcia and colleagues take public input on delayed unemployment benefits

Lansing – State Sen. Valde Garcia, R-Howell, and fellow committee members listened to public testimony Wednesday to learn why many Michigan workers and families are being affected by backlogged unemployment benefit claims.

“The delayed payment of unemployment benefits has a massive and devastating impact on Michigan’s employers and employees,” said Sen. Valde Garcia, R-Howell, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor and Economic Development. “Listening to the thoughts and concerns of residents experiencing problems with the unemployment system has helped us get a better understanding of the scope of the problem. Hopefully, we will now be better able to work on getting these issues dealt with.”

A representative from Ames Brothers Cement in Fowlerville shared his thoughts and said that “the state needs a quicker process” to deal with claims, where both parties involved in a dispute can address their concerns.

Ames Brothers Cement had a complication with an unemployment claim against them when a former employee filed while business owners were out of town and unable to respond within the required 10 days. Since the company did not dispute the claim – benefits were paid.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth promised to correct customer service problems in January 2003. Although some improvements were made, serious problems have persisted with regard to the processing of unemployment claims.

“Currently, there are 70,000 complaints being handled in the system,” Garcia said. “We have invited the department to testify and justify the complaints we have heard. Until that time my colleagues and I will do the best we can to serve our unemployed constituents.”

A continuation of testimony, including a response from the department, will be scheduled in the coming weeks.

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